



**Missouri Public
Service Commission**

Cold Weather Rule Information Guide





The Missouri Public Service Commission, also known as the PSC, is a state government agency located in Jefferson City. The PSC regulates all investor-owned utilities in Missouri. The Commission regulates utility rates and ensures service given by those utilities is safe and adequate.

The Cold Weather Rule relates to any residential gas or electric service that is necessary to the proper function and operation of heating equipment. Electric or gas service provided by municipalities, electric cooperatives, and propane delivered by truck is not covered by this regulation.

This pamphlet attempts to answer some of the most frequently asked questions about the Cold Weather Rule relating to the responsibility of both the utility and the customer. Please refer to the last page of this pamphlet for information on how to contact the Commission should you desire further information or wish to file a complaint.

What Does The Cold Weather Rule Mean To You?

- 1.** Prohibits disconnection of heat-related service when the temperature is forecasted to drop below 30 degrees.
- 2.** Allows you to budget your payments over 12 months.
- 3.** Allows you to extend payment of pre-existing arrears beyond 12 months.
- 4.** Does not require a deposit if payment agreement is kept.
- 5.** Requires that you be notified by mail, and an attempt in person, before your service is shut off.
- 6.** Allows you to register with the utility if 60 years of age or older or if you are handicapped.
- 7.** Requires that you be notified of possible financial help in paying your bill.
- 8.** Allows reconnection of your service for less than the full amount owed.

Questions and Answers Regarding The Cold Weather Rule

- Q.** What is the period of time covered by this rule?
- A.** November 1 through March 31.
- Q.** What must I pay if I cannot pay my full bill?
- A.** First the utility must offer you a 12-month budget plan.
- Q.** What if I can't afford the payments under a 12-month budget plan because I already owe them a past due balance?
- A.** If you already have a past due balance, you may arrange to pay it over a period longer than 12 months.
- Q.** What if I don't need 12 months to pay?
- A.** You may make arrangements to pay your past due amount, plus your current bills, in less than 12 months.
- Q.** If I break my Cold Weather Rule payment agreement, can the utility require the full amount I owe?
- A.** No. If you break your payment agreement, the utility will require the amount of your agreement that is past due. For example, if you are on a 12-month budget plan and required to pay \$60.00 per month and you failed to pay that amount for two months and you received a disconnect notice, you would be required to pay \$120.00, which is the two past due payments of \$60.00 each.

Q. What if I receive energy assistance?

A. If the utility receives notice that you will receive a grant equal to the amount of any payment required, you will not be required to make an additional payment for that same period.

Q. What if I had a Cold Weather Rule payment agreement before, for example last year, and didn't keep it?

A. If you did not keep your Cold Weather Rule payment agreement before, you could be required to pay the total of the past due installments. You will need to contact your utility company and ask for an agreement to pay something less than the full delinquent amount.

Q. What if I have tampered with my meter or received stolen utility service?

A. The utility is not required to reconnect your service under the Cold Weather Rule if you have received the benefit of stolen electric or gas service. You may also be prosecuted for theft and it can be unsafe to reconnect.

Q. What must I do to keep service on if I cannot pay the full bill?

A. You must:

- Contact the utility company.
- State you are unable to pay in full.
- Apply for financial assistance.
- Provide income information if requested.
- Make a minimum payment.
- Enter into a payment agreement.

Q. Do I have to pay a deposit?

A. No, as long as you keep your payment agreement.

Q. What type of notice must I be given if a utility is going to shut off my service?

A. The utility must:

- Mail you a notice 10 days before the date it intends to shut off your service.
- Attempt to contact you within 96 hours before the shut off (this may be a second written notice, a doorhanger, or two attempts to contact you by phone).
- Attempt to contact you right before the shut off.
- Leave notice at your home when your service is shut off.

Q. Is the utility required to tell me how to avoid the shut off?

A. Yes. The notices before shut off must tell you how the payment you must make is calculated and that you may apply for help in paying your bill from the Missouri Division of Family Services. The utility must also give you a list of other organizations you may be able to get assistance from in paying your bill if these organizations have told the utility they provide this type of assistance.

Q. Can the utility shut off my service if the temperature is below 30 degrees?

A. No. The utility cannot shut off your service on a day when the National Weather Service has issued a local forecast between 6:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m., for the following 24 hours, predicting the temperature will drop below 30 degrees.

Q. Can the utility shut off my service on a Friday or a day before a holiday?

A. It's possible. However, the utility cannot shut off your service on any day when: (1) utility employees will not be available to reconnect your service on the following day or days (weekends) or holidays and (2) the National Weather Service local forecast between 6:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m., predicts the temperature will drop below 30 degrees.

Q. If the utility is unable to disconnect my service on the day it is scheduled because it is too cold, can the utility disconnect my service the day after if the forecast does not predict it will drop below 30 degrees?

A. Yes, it can. The utility is not required to go through the notice process twice. Normally, disconnect notices will state that your service is due to be disconnected on or after a certain date. If the weather does not permit a disconnect on the scheduled date, the utility may reschedule the disconnect, if the weather permits, and it is within 11 business days after that date. Don't take any chances. Call the utility anytime a bill cannot be paid on time and make payment arrangements.

Q. What if my service is already disconnected, is the utility required to reconnect my service if the temperature is forecasted to drop below 30 degrees?

A. No. You should contact the company and make payment arrangements under the Cold Weather Rule for service to be reconnected.

Q. What is a registered elderly or handicapped customer?

A. This is a customer who filed a form with a utility company stating that he/she is 60 years of age or older or handicapped to the extent that he/she cannot leave the home without assistance. The utility must notify you and a person or agency you have listed on the registration form that service is to be disconnected. The utility must also make an extra attempt to reach you by telephone if service is to be disconnected.

Q. If I apply and qualify for Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funding, could I also qualify for Lifeline telephone service?

A. Yes. Federal funding for Lifeline telephone service may reduce the cost of basic local telephone service by approximately \$5.25 to \$6.10 a month. Consumers who do not qualify for energy assistance, may qualify for Lifeline telephone service if they receive Medicaid, food stamps, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or federal public housing assistance or Section 8. Please contact your local telephone service provider for more information.

Complaints

If you have a complaint about a bill or service, you should first try to solve the problem with the utility involved. If that fails, you have the right to file an informal complaint with the PSC. The PSC has a toll free number. That number is:

1-800-392-4211

You may send a letter to the following mailing address:

Missouri Public Service Commission
Consumer Services Office
P. O. Box 360
Jefferson City, MO 65102

This pamphlet is intended for information purposes only. Individuals having specific legal questions may refer to or consult their own attorney or the Office of Public Counsel.



**Missouri Public Service Commission
Governor Office Building
200 Madison Street
P.O. Box 360
Jefferson City, MO 65102**

**Consumer Hotline: 1-800-392-4211
website: www.psc.state.mo.us**

